

**Jane McCabe per *Diadem* to Melbourne 10 Jan 1850
 married George Knight, English ex-convict**

[Written by descendant John McKay, January 2013]

This Knight family's history in Australia begins with the marriage of pardoned English convict George Knight and a young Irish orphan Jane McCabe that took place by Banns at St James Church of England, Melbourne on Monday 8 April 1850.¹

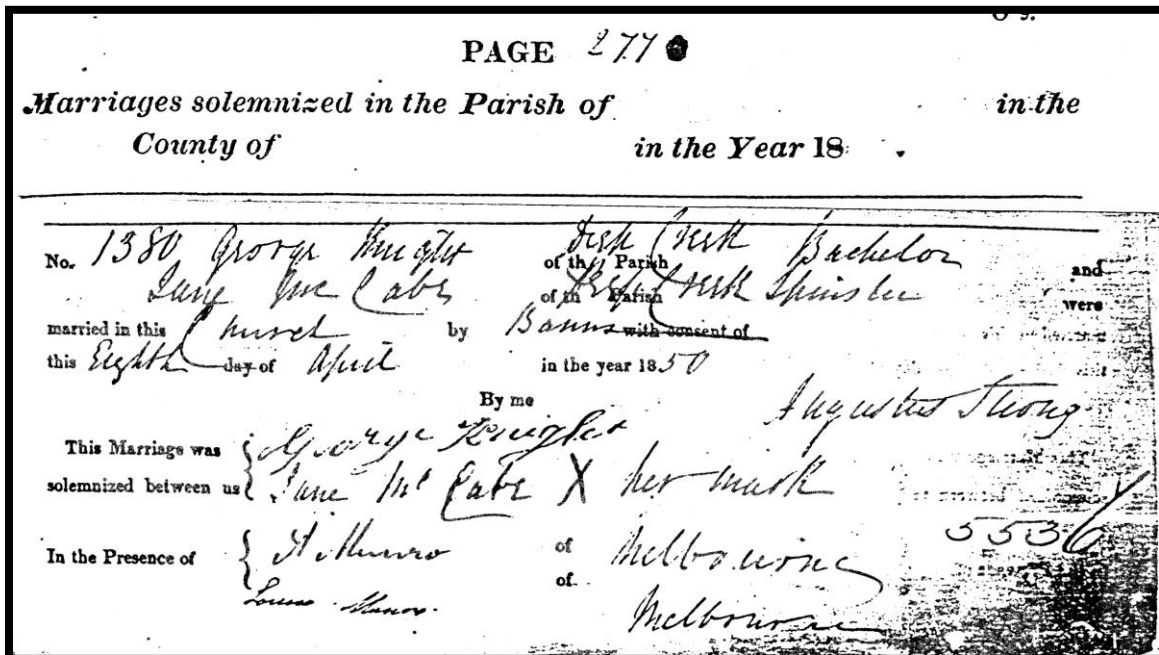


Fig. 1 Copy of marriage certificate, George Knight and Jane McCabe

Their marriage is interesting for several reasons:

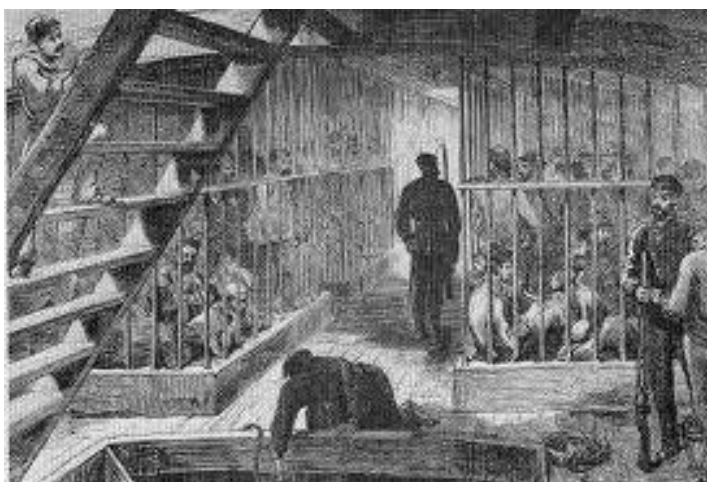
- Jane had only been in the colony for about 3 months
- She had emigrated from Britain under the Earl Grey Orphan Scheme
- Permission to marry would have been gained from the Orphans' committee
- George was able to read and write but Jane could only read
- George was about 38 years-old whilst Jane was actually 14
- George is cited as a bachelor yet he had a wife and 5 children back in England

To better understand these circumstances it is necessary to examine their respective histories before arrival in Australia

¹ **Banns of marriage**, commonly known simply as "the banns" or "bans" (from a Middle English word meaning "proclamation," were the public announcement in a Christian parish church of an impending marriage between two specified persons. It is commonly associated with the Church of England and served the purpose of enabling anyone to raise any canonical or civil legal impediment to the marriage, so as to prevent marriages that are invalid.

George Knight

The 430 ton barque *Stratheden* left London on Thursday 31 July 1845 under the command of Captain John Bruton and with Dr H. Baker RN. It was the third 'exile' vessel to leave English shores.



On board were 154 transported male convicts who arrived at Van Diemen's Land (Hobart, Tasmania) on Thursday 25 December. They were accompanied by 50 men of the 11th Regiment, accompanied by 6 of their wives and 10 children.

103 convicts were landed and the ship continued on to the Port Phillip settlement (Victoria) arriving on Monday 27 January 1846 and disembarked her remaining 51 convicts or 'Pentonville Exiles' as they were termed, including prisoner number 40695, George Knight.

George had been convicted on counts of larceny at the City of Wells Quarter Sessions in Somerset on Monday 3 July 1843. After the hearing George was temporarily taken to Taunton and sent, on 7 August 1843, to the recently completed model-prison at Middlesex, London.

The following is a copy of the actual Pentonville Prisoner's Register 1842-47.²

No.	Name	Age	Weight	Sentence	From	Address
4030	George Knight	32	10 0	7. y.	Taunton	Churchill 12 miles from Bristol
				5 July Stealing City of Wells 3 Articles		breasted Inmate and 7 yrs Transport
	John Knight Labourer dead.	Married	Five	Labourer	Excellent	

This record shows that George was 32 years of age, weighed 10 stone (63.5kg) had been sentenced to 7 years transportation; that he was received from Taunton and lived

² Prison Commission Records; Pentonville. County, Middlesex, Class and Piece Number HO11/14, p.357 (180), Australian Joint Copying Project, Microfilm Roll 91, AJCP Reel 5977.

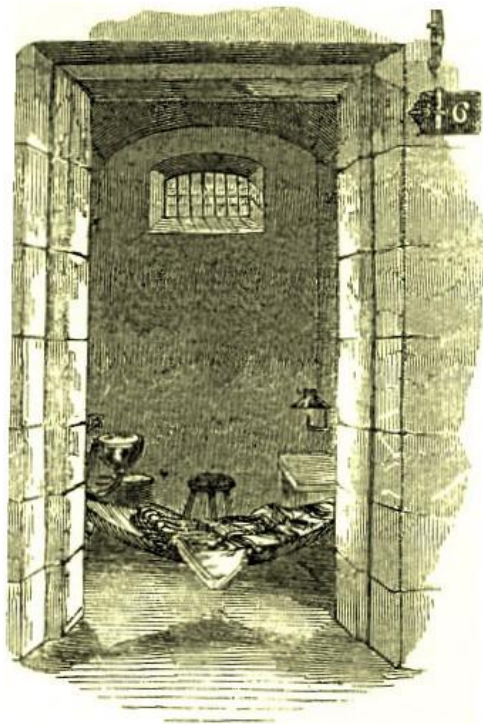
at Churchill, 12 miles from Bristol. He was convicted of ‘stealing 3 asses’, sentenced to 6 weeks imprisonment and 7 years transportation.

Finally his father is noted as John Knight, labourer deceased; that he was married with 5 children, was himself a labourer and otherwise of excellent character.

Interestingly a 24 year old George Knight (i.e. born about 1812) was found not guilty of larceny on 2 April 1836 but there is no certainty that this is the same George who later stole 3 asses.

Pentonville prison, for first-time offenders, was state-of-the-art for those times and it centred largely upon isolating prisoners to minimise trouble. This practice was also followed at Port Arthur for what we today would consider solitary confinement (Figure 3, cell drawing below left) which included a period of very hard labour. This was the prevailing fad in the British penal system and was thought to be extremely effective.

On arrival at the prison a convict was stripped naked; the contents of his pockets placed in an envelope, his clothing fumigated. He was then immersed waist deep in a carbolic bath and after drying himself, a list of his scars and other distinguishing marks was made. After a medical examination his head was shaved, he was allotted a number and a cell.



Convicts were required to wear a hood over their head when out of their cell and were forbidden to speak to anyone other than their guard. Even the church was fitted with partitioned pews so the only person to be seen was the pastor.

George Knight was effectively placed in separate confinement for the duration of his imprisonment, although he was allowed one visitor half yearly. He could not communicate with any other prisoner. There was a notice in his cell that indicated his eventual destination and fate.

Rehabilitation of prisoners saw them taught to read and write as well as a trade. George was trained to become a tailor, an expertise he would later apply in Australia.

His daily routine began at 5.30am when he was woken by a bell. Half an hour later the cells were unlocked and tools for the day were delivered by the warders. He probably took his turn on the ‘pump party’ which required 16 hooded men to work for an hour to pump the 7,200 gallons of water for general consumption from the 370 feet deep well. There were several rotating shifts of this activity which ensured physical exercise.

Between 6 and 7 o'clock cells and the corridor were cleaned and hammocks rolled up. At 7.30am breakfast was served in the cell which was followed by chapel, if not engaged on the pumps. At 10am inmates were segregated into individual stalls for school-type instruction.

After lunch prisoners would work in the cells, continue trade related training or were exercised. Dinner was supplied at 5.30pm after which work continued until 8 o'clock when hammocks could be slung and prisoners enjoyed a free-hour before lights were extinguished.

George was granted a Warrant of Royal Pardon in England dated 24th July 1845 (similar to Figure 7 below) after two years in Pentonville and 7 days before sailing to Australia. The British Government was thus able to send "free men" to the Port Phillip District during the period 1844-1849. These transportees became known as "exiles" because they had been 'pardoned' and technically not convicts.

The only proviso was that they completed the remainder of their sentences in the colony working as a squatters' labourer. George was originally engaged by Mr Roadknight

"We, in consideration of some circumstances humbly represented unto us, are graciously pleased to extend our mercy and grace unto them and to grant them our pardon for which they stand convicted, On condition they do remain and continue within Our Australian Territories whither they are about to be sent in pursuance of their respective sentences, for and during the remaining term of such respective sentence. Our Will and pleasure therefore is that you do take notice hereof and that upon of the before mentioned persons in our said Australian Territories, this our pardon shall have the effect of a free pardon within our said Australian Territories, and for so doing, this shall be your warrant" &c

Many of the Pentonville prisoners suffered epileptic type attacks after they were several days at sea as a result of suddenly coming into contact with other people after years of isolation.

The voyage enjoyed generally good weather and the convicts were said, by the ship's surgeon, have '... come aboard in good health and disembarked in better health'. Everyone received an ounce of lemon juice each day to prevent scurvy.

Other notable Pentonville inmates

- Oscar Wilde spent time in Pentonville before being transferred to Wandsworth.
- Boy George for assault and false imprisonment of a male escort in 2009
- George Michael for drug offences in 2010

George Knight appears in the 1847 Port Phillip Directory (page 103) as a tailor

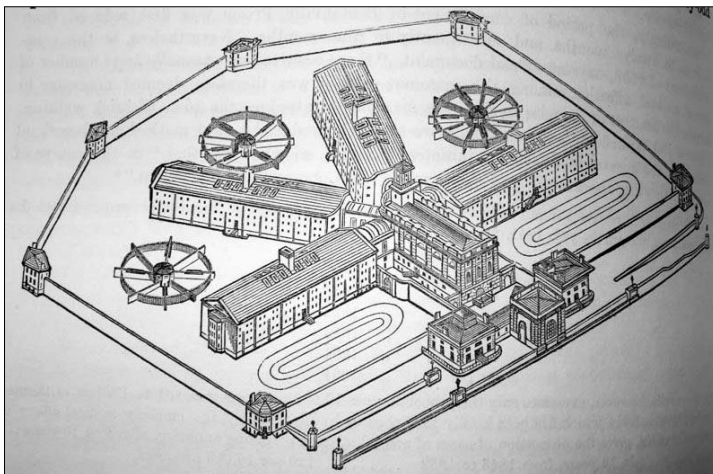
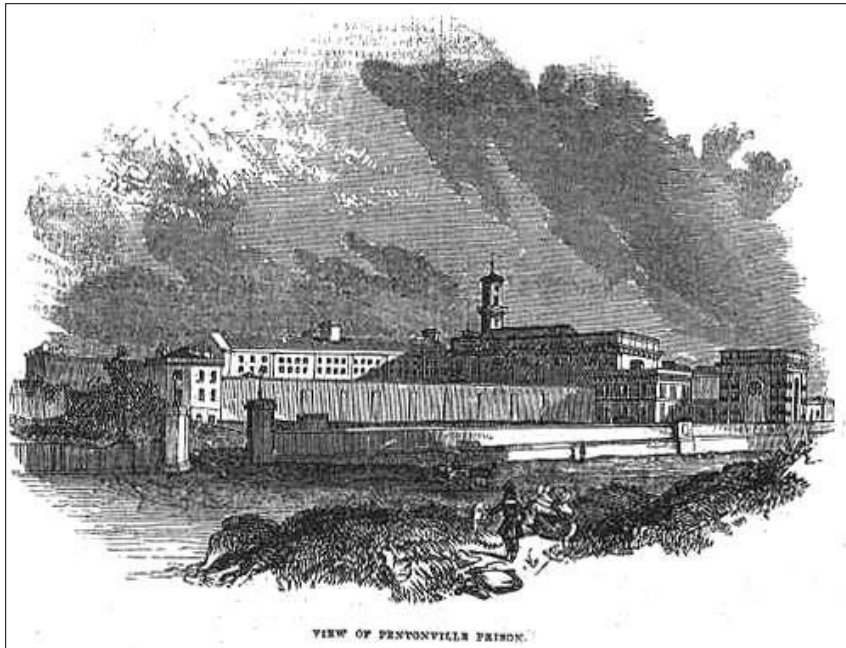
He also appears in 1866-67 *Stevens Geelong and Western District Directory* in George Street Newtown and Chilwell.

Notes: 1841 England Census

George Knight age 30 wife Mary age 30, ch Mary 5, Jane 3

Estimated Birth Year: abt 1811 Gender: Male Where born: Somerset, England Civil parish: Ash Priors Hundred: West Kingsbury County: Somerset Country: Registration district: Taunton

Pentonville Prison – drawings from newspapers of the time



Jane McCabe

At this point there is no absolute reference point for Jane's birth to determine her family. However, the Parish of Devenish 1841 Census, recorded privately by the Church of Ireland Rector the Rev Steele, shows a Protestant McCabe family recorded in the Townland of Kilmore:

James McCabe
Wife Bessy and their family
William, James, Anne, Jane, Eliza, and Isabella³

No other information is recorded except that the landlord was the Marquis of Ely.

The Parish baptismal records cite 3 Jane McCabes:

1. 11 February 1810 at Magheragammon - unlikely
2. 28 February 1836 at Drumschallop - probable
3. 20 October 1839 at Fardrum - unlikely

The second record at Drumschallop is the most likely to fit with Jane McCabe who married George Knight. Given that at her death in 1885 she was recorded as 50 years of age, this could well be Jane McCabe's family

Consequential also is the naming of Jane's children; Elizabeth Jane, who was called Bessy probably for Jane's mother, Mary Ann for sister Anne, William for her eldest brother, Eliza for her sister and George with James as a second name for her father and remaining brother.

The Clan McCabe (McCaba) originated from the Western Isles of Scotland. In the 1350s they were recruited as galloglasses' (professional soldiers) to fight for the O'Reilly and O'Rourke Clans of Breffny/Co Cavan. They settled there and became a recognised Breffny Clan. The McCabe crest is pictured right (figure 4).

Their Chief was made the Constable of Breffny/Cavan and because of how close this was to Counties Fermanagh and Monaghan they moved into some areas of both counties.



Though of the Protestant faith, 99% of the McCabe's in Fermanagh Co were Catholic.

Jane's parents and possibly her siblings were more than likely victims of the Great (Potato) Famine of 1845-50 which devastated not only Ireland but much of Europe. Further research will determine if any of Jane's siblings survived.

³ Per Mr Frank Roofe, Old Rossorry, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, Ireland, 4 March 2011

Jane entered the Enniskillen, Workhouse in County Fermanagh on Tuesday 9 January 1849, probably malnourished, small and thin, clothed in nothing but rags and she would have endured many deprivations until she left for Australia at the end of September that year. The workhouse register recorded that she was Protestant (Church of England) and from Ely, Kilmore.

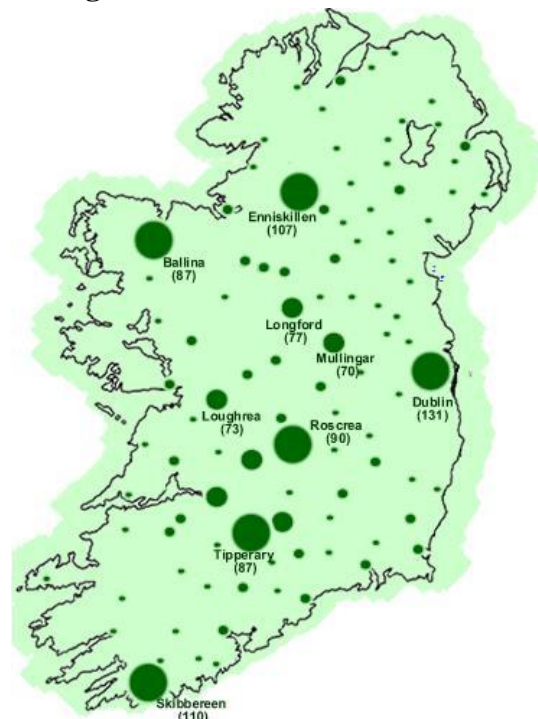
Workhouse records provide some detail on the impoverished state of girls and young women arriving at their door: - ‘... a 15 year old of no fixed address ... was thin and hungry’. Others were cited as ‘thinly clothed and destitute’ or ‘... in a starving condition’. Others had been abandoned by their parents and were of the “vulnerable destitute class of Irish Society”.⁴



Enniskillen Workhouse as it is today © P. Higginbotham
[\[http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Enniskillen/\]](http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Enniskillen/)

Between 1848 and 1850 over 4,000 adolescent female orphans were emigrated from Irish workhouses to Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Their migration became known as the ‘Earl Grey scheme’ after its principal architect, Earl Grey, Secretary of State for the Colonies in Lord Russell’s Whig government at the time of the Great Irish Famine.

The large numbers from Enniskillen are indicated on map of Ireland opposite. The local Poor Law Unions provided orphans with and outfit for the voyage consisting of ‘six shifts, two flannel



⁴ Barefoot and Pregnant; T. McClaghlin – recommended reading!

petticoats, six pair stockings, two pair shoes and two gowns’.



Jane left Gravesend near London via the 626-714 tonne 2-mast wooden schooner *Diadem*,⁵ on Sunday 30 September 1849 en route to Plymouth, departing there on the Saturday 13 October with Captain Underwood in charge. They ultimately arrived in the colony of Port Phillip, which was still part of New South Wales, on Thursday 10 January 1850.

Jane and the other 204 orphans were moved to the Depot the subsequent Saturday. The Government Depot at 26 William Street, Melbourne served as a place the orphan girls stayed until they secured employment. They had a bed and food provided by the government. Nearly 2,000 girls went through this facility over the course of the scheme.

Jane was listed in the Depot registers as ‘parents unknown’, 18 years old from Enniskillen, County Fermanagh Ireland and affiliated with the Church of England.⁶

Despite also being cited as having ‘no previous service in employment’ she found work shortly after on Friday January 18 with James Purvis (aka Purves), Chewton (or Chinton), for 6 months as an indentured servant at £10 per annum.

The Earl Grey scheme was relatively short-lived, lasting two years as many ‘anti’ groups saw Australia being flooded with poor quality Irish immigrants. These young women were condemned in local newspapers as being unskilled, untrained, useless, and a financial strain on the fledgling Australian economy.

Although the scheme was the brain-child of the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, it was paid for by the Australian people. In May 1850, a month after Jane’s marriage to George Knight, the scheme was suspended.

The circumstances surrounding their marriage are unclear but the colony was suffering a major imbalance in the ratio of males to females.

Jane, barely a teenager, would have effectively been on her own, without any family or friendly support to ensure her on-going security so marriage would likely have presented as a survival necessity. The harsh, rustic environment would have been a fearful proposition for anyone let alone an Irish orphan destined never again to see her homeland and what may have remained of her family after the horrors of the Irish Famine.

⁵ A Greek word, **diadem** is a type of crown, specifically an ornamental headband worn by Eastern monarchs and others as a badge of royalty.

⁶ From the irishfaminememorial.org website

Knight family in Australia

George appears to have been engaged in with the Roadknight properties around Yan Yan Gurt, a place named after an aboriginal term for 'flowing water', a farming district in the Colac-Cape Otway district in the shire of Winchelsea, south west of Geelong.

The couple's first child Elizabeth Jane was born there in 1852 whilst second child Mary Ann was born not far away in the district of Birregurra where the Roadknights' also held extensive grazing land



George and Jane's eight children were:

1. Elizabeth Jane - 1852
2. Mary Ann - 1854
3. William Alfred - 1856
4. Eliza Margaret - 1859
5. Amelia Emma - 1861
6. George James - 1863
7. Frederick Charles – 1866 d 1932 Bathurst NSW?
8. Margaret Ellen - 1869

Not long after the birth of Mary Ann it appears that the family moved to Newtown & Chilwell, a collection of suburbs to the south west of Geelong, where the remaining children were born. The family seemed to move around a good deal but staying mainly in the Newtown, Geelong West area. There is no evidence to suggest the move other than the availability of work and, perhaps with a growing family, the availability of reasonable accommodation. There is no evidence that George & Jane ever owned property in the town.

Jane died aged 50 on Wednesday 7 January 1885 at the Geelong Hospital from cancer of the intestines and faecal fistula (following operations on intestines in which sepsis [puss-forming infection] is present, when the channel is from the intestine through the wound). She was buried 2 days later by the rites of Primitive Methodist and interred in the Church of England section (1-377) Geelong West Cemetery.

The informant at her death was second eldest child, daughter Mary Ann Baker of Union Street, Chilwell who recorded that her mother was 14 when she married in 1850.

George survived Jane by 3 years passing away at the age of 76 on Thursday 26 January 1888, also at the Geelong Hospital from hypertrophy (excessive thickening of part of an organ by increase in its own tissues) and dilation of the heart from which he had suffered for the last year of his life.

There are also 2 stillborn Piper infants, a female 1 May 1942 and male 27 August 1943 buried in the same unmarked grave. It would be fitting if the family could band together and afford their ancestors a suitable marker for them.

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